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4. A CASE OF TOTAL ALBINISM IN THE FIVE-STRIPED PALM SQUIRREL
FUNAMBULUS PENNANTI WROUGHTON IN SINDHUDURG DISTRICT,
MAHARASHTRA STATE

Albinism in wild rodent species is a rare occurrence, though it has been reported in some cases such as *Cremnomys blanfordi* (Rajagopalan 1967), *Bandicota indica*, *Rattus rattus* (Pradhan 1975) and *Funambulus pennanti* (Chaturvedi and Ghose 1984). Harrison (1950) has also dealt with albinism as well as melanism in rodent species. Apart from albinism, Pradhan (1975, 1993) and Bhat (1979) have reported occurrence of white patches on thoracic and inguinal regions in the species of *Rattus*, *Bandicota*, *Mus* and *Golunda*. Pradhan and Mithel (1981) indicated possible genetic control for occurrence of white patch in *Rattus rattus rufescens*.

Albinism in Five-striped palm squirrel has been reported from the erstwhile Oudh, Uttar Pradesh (Agrawal and Chakraborty 1979) and Chandigarh (Chaturvedi and Ghose 1984) in India. Since then, no specific report of albinism in this Indian rodent species is available. In November 2001, a team from the Zoological Survey of India, Pune visited different areas of Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra State, to conduct a status survey on the Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* (Jerdon). The team came across a live albino form of a squirrel species. Observing through a pair of 7 x 50 binoculars, we noticed that the individual was white with faint red spots, narrow stripes on the flanks, pink eyes and yellowish forehead. Two species of striped squirrels have been reported from this region (Ellerman 1961): 1. Three-striped Jungle Squirrel *Funambulus tristriatus* with three stripes and a distinct red colouration in the inguinal region and on the ventral side of the tail and 2. Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti* with five stripes and no red colouration in the inguinal region and below the tail. The *F. pennanti* specimen studied by Chaturvedi and Ghose (1984) from Chandigarh was a spotless white. One of us (MSP) identified the live albino squirrel, photographed near Deogad Fort, as *Funambulus pennanti* Wroughton (Photographic evidence provided by the authors – Eds). The squirrel was seen moving on a rocky wall of the fort in the morning hours of November

22, 2001. Deogad Fort (16° 23' N, 73° 21' E) is situated very close to the Arabian Sea in the Deogad taluka, Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra State.

After a while, AM and RMS spotted a solitary albino young (hardly a foot away from where the adult was first sighted), which quickly moved into the nesting site, in an inaccessible rocky crevice, depriving us of a photographic opportunity. Further attempts to locate both the individuals were futile. Hutt (1969) considered albinism as an indication of infertility. However, in the present case, sighting of an albino young with an albino adult indicates the likelihood of a naturally breeding albino population of *F. pennanti* in the wild.

The present report of albinism in *F. pennanti* is probably the third from India. Albinism is known to occur when the genes for pigmentation fail to be expressed, and its occurrence in the wild is rare.

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5. OCCURRENCE OF LITTLE CORMORANT *PHALACROCORAX NIGER* IN LADAKH

On the afternoon of August 18, 2002 between 1330-1340 hours, an adult Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* was observed in the Indus river near Mahe (33° 05' N and 78° 02' E) in Ladakh, far to the north of its hitherto known range in the Indian subcontinent. The bird was immediately identified as Little Cormorant, a species familiar to the observers. The individual was observed repeatedly diving for fish in the murky water of the swollen river.

Ali and Ripley (1981), Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) do not mention Ladakh in the species distribution. As far as we are aware, there are no previous records of the Little Cormorant from Ladakh except one recent sighting from Shey fish tanks near Leh where two birds were sighted in the summer of 2001 (Otto Pfister *pers.*

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We thank Otto Pfister for providing us the recent sight record.

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6. AN INSTANCE OF MORTALITY AND NOTES ON BEHAVIOUR OF BLACK-NECKED STORKS *EPHIPPIORHYNCHUS ASIATICUS*

The Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* is one of the least studied large water birds in India and very little is known of their ecology (Rahmani 1989). During fieldwork in Etawah and Mainpuri districts, Uttar Pradesh between September 1999 and July 2002, I maintained detailed records of all sightings of Black-necked Storks. In this note, an instance of adult mortality and some interesting behaviours are documented. Fieldwork was carried out in an area of c. 500 sq. km, within the towns of Etawah, Karhal, Kishni and Baralokpur.

Mortality

In December 1999, an adult male Black-necked Stork was found dead below electric lines at Saiphai (26° 57.063' N, 78° 57.518' E). The body had been in water for three to four days when discovered and it was not possible to ascertain

whether the bird had been killed by collision or electrocution with the wire. The stork had been seen to roost alone in an adjoining field regularly and was most likely killed while returning to the roost or flying from it to a wetland across the road, where it used to feed during the day. The prevalence of morning and evening fog during December in the area must have led to the mortality. From interviews with villagers it appeared that storks die infrequently in the area due to collision with electric lines.

While electrocution/ collision with electric wires of large-bodied water birds is widespread in occurrence, it has not been previously reported for Black-necked Storks, and in Ciconiidae, collision-related mortality has been previously recorded only for the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* (Bevanger 1998). In fact, there is no reference in literature to any form of adult mortality in Black-necked Storks. However, the